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A Study of Student Perceptions Regarding Attendance in a Rural East Tennessee High School.

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A Study of Student Perceptions

Regarding Attendance in a Rural

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Doctor of Education

_____

by

Selina Michelle Rector Blevins

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ABSTRACT

A Study of Student Perceptions

Regarding Attendance in a Rural

East Tennessee High School

by

Selina Michelle Rector Blevins

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the perceptions
of high school students' reasons for truancy.

Findings of the study revealed the perceptions of 916 high
school students enrolled in an East Tennessee high school.

The review of literature concerning attendance revealed
absenteeism as a problem that either directly or indirectly
affects all educational stakeholders. Data gathered from
the student surveys indicated students are absent from
school for a variety of reasons including, but not limited
to, peer pressure, poor relationships with teachers and
administrators, a disconnectedness from their schools, not
being interested in the curriculum, bullying, and low self-
esteem, substance abuse, language barriers, lack of
appropriate social skills, and sexual activity or
consequences thereof (pregnancy, teen parenting).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Bobbie Carder, my teacher, mentor, and friend for encouraging me to reach for the stars and that anything is possible through faith and perseverance.

Thank you, Donna Saylor for encouraging me to go to college.

Finally, I would like to honor the memory of some very special people who loved and supported me throughout my life. I hope I made all of you proud!

-James and Elizabeth Rector – My Grandparents

-Margaret Rector – My Great-Grandmother

-Mamie Lowe – My Very Special Aunt

-Judy Oliver – My Teacher, Mentor, and Friend

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Opening Vignette

Based on my own observations in current and past professional education positions, the following story is representative of students in today's educational communities.

Consider the possibility that you are the parents of two girls, a senior and freshman in high school. You are both college graduates and have worked your way up the ladder of success while instilling and modeling for your daughters' quality morals and values including the importance of getting an education. Mom comes home from an exhausting day of teaching at a local elementary school and dad comes home from a very hectic day at the office only to hear a disturbing message on the answering machine. The message is from Mr. Hale, the girls' high school principal. He would like for you to return a call to him concerning your daughters. The girls are not at home; they are at a ballgame, aren't they? Your emotions and imaginations begin to run wild. Are the girls okay? Why is he calling you? The daughters have never gotten into trouble. Luckily, the

principal is known for working late and you quickly return his call.

When you call the school Mr. Hale answers and tells you that your daughters have been playing hooky from school. Over the past 5 weeks of school the girls have accumulated 4 unexcused absences and 6 unexcused tardies. The unfortunate part is that this is only in the 1st quarter of the school year. The principal asks you if you are aware of the school district's attendance policy that states, "Any student accumulating five or more unexcused absences will be referred to Truancy Board." Your first reactions are, "There must be some mistake! We get the girls up every morning; feed them breakfast, and we all leave the house at the same time, so we know that they have plenty of time to get to school. These are A and B students. They wouldn't skip school, they know better. Are you suggesting that we don't know where our daughters are?" Luckily, the principal is very patient, understanding, and allows time for venting. He is aware that sometimes even good students give in to the pressures of peers or even try to push the limits on their own. The principal is not questioning your parenting skills; he is simply calling to inform you of the current situation and that there are serious repercussions that can affect both your daughters

and you as their parents. The principal suggests checking into the matter with the girls and let him know if there is anything he can help solve the problem.

At the conclusion of the conversation, as parents you are angry, confused, and concerned about your daughters. "Are the girls really skipping school? What are they doing? What are we doing wrong as parents? We provide them a home, food, clothing, and other "material necessities". What can we do? We have to go to work? Are they using drugs? Are they in some kind of trouble? We thought we knew our girls. But, do we"?

The parents in the above scenario are not alone, there are many vignettes similar to this at all levels of society.

Introduction

Regular school attendance precedes school achievement. In order for students to benefit from the educational program they must have good attendance. For this reason, regular school attendance is a high priority among educational systems today. In addition, regular attendance aids in the development of each student becoming a productive member of society.

Absenteeism has been prevalent since the beginning of formal educational programs and, once a student is chronically absent he or she is often referred to as truant. According to the Washington County Department of Education Board Policy, "Truancy is defined as an absence for an entire school day, a major portion of the school day, or the major portion of any class, study hall, or activity during the school day for which the student is scheduled"(Washington County Department of Education, WCDE, 2008). Truancy is a problem that school systems are facing across the nation. While truancy may be more common in certain socioeconomic levels and ethnic groups, it is by no means limited to one or two particular groups. Truancy affects all stakeholders in the educational system in some form. It is essential that educators continue to seek new and innovative solutions to combat truancy while improving academic and social outcomes for students who are at risk and to reduce societal fear of and disdain for these troubled youth (Dougherty, 1999; Gullat & Lemoine, 1997; Strickland, 1999).

Students have to be in school in order to receive an education. Truant students have fewer opportunities to learn and, thus, their academic potential is hindered. According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(2002), student access to educational achievement is directly correlated with time on task in the classroom setting.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) listed the top five reasons for students to stay in school as follows:

1. High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed as those who complete four or more years of high school.

2. Graduating from high school will determine how well they live for the next 50 years of their life.

3. High school graduates earn $143 more per week than high school dropouts. College graduates earn $336 more per week than high school graduates.

4. Dropouts are more likely to apply for and receive public assistance than graduates of high school.

5. Dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates and 82% of the prisoners in America are high school dropouts (p.1).

As a newly appointed attendance official for a local school system, I am very interested in and concerned about truancy, both professionally and personally. I want to explore student perceptions regarding the value of school

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attendance, the effects of truancy, and their perceptions of possible interventions as ways to reduce the problem.

During the summer of 2007, I served as a facilitator for the *Moral Kombat 9 Truancy Intervention Program (2007)[MKTIP]*, developed by Carrie Merchant, with a group of high school students from a northeast Tennessee school system. The students attending the *Moral Kombat Truancy Intervention program* had accumulated at least 11 unexcused absences during the regular school year. My class consisted of 4 freshmen, 2 sophomores, and 36 seniors. Facilitating this class was truly an eye-opening experience. After the first two sessions it became apparent to me that students were truant for a wide variety of reasons. The students were very open in their discussions with me about their reasons for being absent. Their reasons included sickness, boredom at school, lack of parental involvement, peer influence, alcohol and substance abuse, bullying, and poor teacher-student and administrator-student relationships. I found a correlation between reasons for absences as indicated by my MK class and the information obtained from a review of relevant literature.

Surprisingly little research has been done on absenteeism and truancy, even though absenteeism is a problem that either directly or indirectly affects all

educational stakeholders. As stated above, students are absent from school for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, peer pressure; poor relationships with teachers and administrators; a disconnectedness from their schools; lack of interest in the curriculum; bullying; low self-esteem; substance abuse; language barriers; lack of appropriate social skills; sexual activity or consequences thereof, for example pregnancy, teen parenting, etc. Unfortunately, truant consequences often lead to increased costs to schools and communities (DeKalb, 1999).

Truancy is also one of the leading reasons students do not graduate from high school, live in poverty, and are often incarcerated. The literature review offers insight into recent research that suggests school absenteeism and truancy are linked to three main domains: student variables, school factors, and family factors.

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, 54% of all petitioned truancy cases between 1990 and 1999 were males, and 46% were females (Puzzanchera, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of high school students' reasons for absenteeism.

Research Questions

1. What school factors do students perceive are associated with school attendance?

2. What common variables do students perceive are associated with student attendance?

3. What percentage of students report missing class for the following reasons: being unprepared for class, conflict with teacher, a result of being bullied, to engage in sexual activity, or perceived class as boring.

Significance of the Study

Information obtained about students' perceptions concerning school attendance provides important insight into some of the causes and effects of their school absenteeism. Absenteeism is a problem school systems face all across the nation. Students who are frequently absent are more likely to drop out of high school, be in trouble with law enforcement, engage in premarital sexual activity, and need financial support from the government in order to obtain basic necessities for themselves and their future families. Consequently, student absenteeism is not merely a concern for educators; it either directly or indirectly affects all citizens. In addition, absenteeism directly

affects the academic success of students and has strong associations with employment, relationships, etc. (Moral Kombat 9(MK9).

Information concerning attendance as reported by the students surveyed, while keeping their identity anonymous will be presented to administrators of the school with the hope they will gain a better understanding of their students and truancy prevention options.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The participants were students currently enrolled in an East Tennessee high school during 2008. The students surveyed were enrolled in grades 9-12. The survey instrument concluded with open-ended questions. The findings of this study may not be generalized to other populations. The obtained data were self-reported with a return rate of 68.6% which may have been affected by the 124 students absent on December 16, 2008. Parental permission was obtained through informed consent. Letters were sent home with students and posted on the school's website one week prior to the data collection. Surprisingly, no parents declined for their student to participate in the study. There were limited validity and reliability data for the survey.

Definitions of Terms

1. Absenteeism – "chronic absence (as from work or school)" (Merriam-Webster, 2008).

2. Adequate Yearly Progress – "A school system's ability to meet required performance expectations from year to year regarding academic achievement" (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

3. Attendance – "The act of being present at school" (Merriam-Webster).

4. Compulsory Education – "Laws that ensure children of a certain age attend school regularly" (Encyclopedia of Everyday Law, 2007).

5. Excused Absence – "An excused absence is one that occurs for an approved reason and is supported by a written note from a parent (guardian), physician, or school nurse" (Kingsport City Department of Education) (KCDE).

6. Local Education Agency (LEA) - "A Local Education Agency is a local public school system, including a county or city school system, a special school district, a unified or metropolitan school system, or any other local public school system or school district created or authorized by the Tennessee General Assembly" (Tennessee Department of Education).

7. Moral Kombat – A Cognitive Behavioral Based and Character Education Intervention and Awareness Program developed by Carrie Merchant (Moral Kombat, MK 9).

8. Tennessee Code Annotated – Tennessee State Laws (LexisNexis, 2007)

9. Truancy – "Truancy is defined as an absence for an entire school day, a major portion of the school day,

or the major portion of any class, study hall, or
activity during the school day for which the student
is scheduled"(Washington County Department of
Education((WCDE).

10. Truant Officer – "a person employed by a public-
    school system to investigate the continued absences of
    pupils —also called attendance officer, truancy
    officer" (Merriam-Webster).

11. Unexcused Absence – "An absence not supported by a
    note or phone call from a parent (guardian),
    physician, or other appropriate professional will be
    considered an unexcused absence" (KCDE).

Scope of the Study

I conducted a mixed methods (qualitative and
quantitative) study. The predominant method was
quantitative. The quantitative aspect of the research was
conducted by surveying students in one rural high school in
East Tennessee. The qualitative aspect was conducted by
collecting data via open-ended questions on a student
survey and reviewing internal documents related to
attendance.

Overview of the Study

The mixed-methods study is presented in five chapters.
Chapter 1 provides an introduction, research questions, a
statement of significance, and the scope of the study. In

addition, limitations, delimitations, and key terms are
described. At the end of Chapter 1, an overview of the
study is presented. Chapter 2 examines and reviews related
literature pertaining to the cause and effects of truancy
as well as possible interventions. Chapter 3 includes a
description of the research methods and procedures used
throughout the study. Data were summarized, analyzed, and
interpreted in Chapter 4. A summary of findings,
conclusions, and recommendations for further research and
possible interventions are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It wasn't until the New World was established in 1642 that compulsory education statutes were established. The new law was a reflection of the colonists' goal to develop a generation of educated, respectful, and upstanding church members. The statute required parents and schoolmasters to provide education in reading and a trade or vocation. The colonists gave select individuals the authority to enforce the law. This early statue required children to receive educational training but it wasn't until "The Old Deluder Satan Act" of 1647 was passed that public schools became statutorily authorized. The law stemmed from a belief that Satan used ignorance to keep individuals away from the Scriptures and a pious lifestyle. To protect the colonists' children the 1647 legislation created schools and appointed teachers to educate their children. These early legislative efforts established the right to present and receive an education but the law did not institute any attendance requirements (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

States didn't require mandatory attendance until the Massachusetts School Attendance Act of 1852. This legislation forced parents to send their children to public

school for at least 12 weeks. Tennessee passed its first compulsory education law as Public Charter 483 on April 12, 1905. Tennessee's laws have evolved into Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) Title 49, Section 6, Chapters 3001-3005 (Katz, 1976).

All states have compulsory education laws that set high expectations for student attendance. School attendance is an extremely important part of Tennessee schools achieving success as set by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). When measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) NCLB requires states to choose an additional indicator, and Tennessee's additional indicator in elementary schools is school attendance. Currently, Tennessee requires all schools to achieve a 93% or greater attendance rate in system and individual school report cards in order to remain in good standing.

Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) defines specific attendance issues such as length of school year, entrance age of students, and reporting procedures (NCLB, 2001). Every child in the state of Tennessee who is age 5 before September 30th is entitled to free public education. Parents and guardians of children between the ages of 6 and 17 are held accountable for student attendance at school. Parents are free to choose between public education and nonpublic

education such as home schools, private schools, or church related schools (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

What is Truancy?

Malcolm (2003) described truancy, as absences that students themselves indicate would be inexcusable to educators. Unexcused absences are absences that are considered inexcusable according to teachers and local education agencies (LEAs). Additionally, unexcused absences include absences that are the result of parents, guardians, and caregivers allowing students to miss school.

Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) suggest that truancy is divided into four broad categories: (1) school influences, (2) family influences, (3) economic variables, and (4) student variables. Family influences may include a lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic disputes, poverty, alcohol or substance abuse in the home, lack of knowledge or understanding of attendance policies and laws, and differing attitudes towards education. School influences include the size of the school, the varied attitudes of teachers, other students, administrators, and the inability of the school to meet the diverse cultural and learning styles of the students. School districts often have attendance procedures or

policies in place but may be inconsistent in enforcing them

appropriately. Economic variables can range from students

who work, single-parent households, parents or guardians

who work more than one job, lack of transportation, lack of

childcare, and high mobility rates. Student variables may

include alcohol or substance abuse, lack of understanding

of attendance policies and consequences, mental or physical

health issues, and lack of social competence (Baker et

al.).

Other researchers have defined truancy from different

perspectives. Stoll (1990) defined truancy as being absent

from school for no logical reason. Atkinson (2000) pointed

to differences in the extent of the absences from simply

avoiding one class period to missing several days, weeks or

even, in rare situations, months. O'Keefe (1993) revealed

the difficulties in determining postregistration truancy

and the specific one class period absence, as these forms

of absence were normally omitted from official school

records. Consequently, Kinder, Wakefield, and Wilkin (1996)

reminded us that postregistration truant students had not

necessarily been absent from school because they may have

been hiding on school property or simply skipping a

particular class or classes.

Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) stated that truancy generally had been associated with four major components: (a)family factors (ex. lack of parental supervision, substance abuse, and domestic violence); (b)student variables (ex. lack of socialization skills, mental health challenges, physical health problems, substance abuse, and sexual activity); (c)school factors (ex. school climate issues, size of school, morale, teacher-student relationships, and inflexibility in meeting the diverse cultural and learning needs of all students); (d) economic influences (ex. single-parent homes, high mobility rates, low socioeconomic status, and student employment).

The causes of truancy are complex. The next section of the literature review highlights the above causes of student absenteeism and truancy and how each causes either directly or indirectly encourages truancy among students at all grade levels. Many students become truant in primary school and continue during the middle and secondary school levels.

Peer Influence

Harris (1996) suggested that peer influence greatly outweighed parental influences. "Teenagers sort themselves out into peer groups that vary in their attitudes toward

intellectual achievement, and they can usually find anti-intellectual groups even in middle-class neighborhoods" (p.263). This statement suggests that the choice of peer groups can greatly affect the academic achievement of students.

High school students are in constant search of their identities. The high school setting is continuously changing. As students interact with peers they are vying for acceptance, personal identity, and survival. Status is socially constructed as students form select peer groups. "What is a group? A group is a social category, a pigeonhole with people in it" (Harris, 1996, p.134-135). Many times, social stratification comes with labels such as freak, fatso, nerd, or class clown. Therefore, some peer groups receive positive recognition and some receive negative recognition. Regrettably, some students are assigned to peer groups instead of choosing their own peer group. "No one chooses to be a nerd or geek, for example… Kids pinned with this label do not have enough status to belong to another group" (Harris, p.135). According to Harris, by the time students reach the high school level, most of them have already been sorted and classified by their classmates.

Peer pressure is also a leading cause of teenagers

becoming sexually active. Many teenagers then find

themselves pregnant or fathering a child. According to the

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2003)

approximately 35% of adolescent females in the United

States become pregnant at least once before age 20. The

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2004) states

that recent studies reported that 14% of high school-aged

males had reported causing at least one pregnancy.

Teenagers who find themselves pregnant or fathering a

child represent a serious concern for communities because

the pregnancy impacts the family and the entire community

as well as the teenagers involved. Teen parents are often

associated with decreased likelihood of completing school,

advancing education, and securing employment and placing an

increased dependence on public assistance. In addition,

30%-50% of teenage mothers experience a second pregnancy

and approximately 25% have repeat births within 2 years of

the first child (Williams & Sadler, 2001).

According to Hoyt and Broom (2002) alternative

education programs are becoming more available to address

the educational, physical, social, emotional, and economic

needs of teenage parents. Comprehensive educational

programs including school-based infant and child care and

effective parenting practices can promote high school

completion rates and enhance the health of the adolescent

parents and their children. Exemplary programs should

include multimodality techniques including adult modeling,

case management, peer counseling, mentoring, group

discussion, role playing, and use of media, lectures,

community members, and public service providers. Williams

and Sadler (2001) concluded that teenage students who

maintain a connection to teachers, administrators,

counselors, and school nurses through educational

organizations are more likely to complete high school and

to delay or eliminate a second teenage pregnancy.

At-Risk Students

Educators and policymakers are constantly looking for

strategies to improve the educational success of at-risk

students. In order to address the needs of at-risk

students, educators must identify them. Research addresses

a variety of indicators common among at-risk students'

ethnic origin, family factors, socioeconomic status,

mobility rate, educational policies, retention, peer

influences, etc. Another powerful indicator of at-risks

students is the parents' educational background and

expectations for their children's academic success (Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000).

Risk Factors for Discipline and Delinquency

Research has suggested that truancy has been cited as an early warning sign that students are heading in the wrong direction, including potentially delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure because of in-school suspension, expulsion, or dropping out of school (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry, & Cothern, 2000). Three grand juries in Dade County, Florida analyzed data in 1991 and again in 1993 from more than 5,000 of the county's most serious juvenile offenders. The findings suggested that excessive truancy was one of the three characteristics that most of the serious juvenile offenders had in common (Dade County Juvenile Defenders, 1993).

Eighty-five juveniles were convicted of murder in the state of New York between the years 1978 and 1986. More than half of those juvenile delinquents (57.6%) had histories of truancy. Court documents for 35% of these youth did not include attendance records with their court documents, which suggests the percentage of truants could possibly have been even higher (Grant, 1992).

Police in North Miami Beach opened a truancy center in 1999. They began searching for and picking up school-aged youths caught on the streets during school hours. Amazingly, the amount of crime in the targeted neighborhoods greatly diminished. Criminal mischief and residential break-ins decreased by 19%, while vehicular burglaries decreased by 22% (Berger, 2000).

Chronic absenteeism has been linked to serious delinquency, violence, and substance abuse. This connection between absenteeism and juvenile delinquency appears to be particularly acute among boys (Kelley, Loeber, Keenan, & DeLamarte, 1997).

Noted as one of the top 10 educational concerns in the United States, truancy has been labeled as one of the first indicators of future delinquent behavior. The number of incarcerations and arrests over the past decades continues to rise. Among the criminal offenders are juveniles. An estimated 2.2 million juveniles were arrested in 2003. They accounted for 16% of all arrests and 15% of all violent crime arrests. Of the juveniles arrested in 2003, 67% were European American, 16% were African American, 11% were Hispanic, 4% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% was Native American; 71% were male compared to 29% female. Among the arrests in 2003, 71% were referred to juvenile

court, 20% were handled by law enforcement agencies, and 9% were referred to criminal court. The majority of offenses committed by the juveniles were referred to as status offenses, which were acts of criminal negligence that are illegal only because the persons committing the crimes were juveniles. The author mentioned four status offense categories including runaways, truancy, underage consumption of alcohol, and ungovernability (Snyder, 2005).

Truancy often has been categorized as juvenile delinquent acts linked to criminal incidences later in life. Authors McCluskey, Bynum, and Patchin (2004) define "truancy as the habitual engagement in unexcused absences from the school setting" (p. 5). The number of cases regarding truancy handled in the juvenile court system is relatively small; although, referral to juvenile court is considered to be a possible strategy to alleviate truancy. Between 1985 and 2000 juveniles ages 15 and younger accounted for 58% of all truancy cases. The percentage of truancy offense cases adjudicated was 63%, with the most common outcome being probation (78%) and out of home placement (10%). Other types of disposition included sanctions such as fines, community service, and release. Adjudication rates were similar across gender, race, and

age (Puzzanchera, Stahl, Finnegan, Tierney, & Snyder, 2004).

Principals have rated absenteeism, truancy, cutting class, and tardiness as the top disciplinary problems in schools (Heaviside, Rowland, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Large cities often see unexcused absences by the thousands on any given day (Stover, 2005). School officials address truancy issues with disciplinary exclusions, which may exacerbate the potential for further absenteeism and disengagement (Jackson & Panyan, 2002).

Truancy is a very powerful indicator of delinquent behavior, which has been identified by many as the first sign of trouble (Tait, 2004). Chronic truancy at the elementary level is generally connected to serious delinquent behavior in children ages 12 and under (Loeber & Farrington, 2000). McCord and Ensminger (1997) also found students who had poor attendance in first grade were more likely to commit violent acts as adults than students who had good attendance in first grade.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Survey data collected from 28 communities between 1980 and 2000 indicated that truancy is a good indicator of middle school student drug use. According to this survey,

eighth graders who were considered truants were 4.5 times more likely to smoke marijuana than students who attended school regularly (Halfors, 2002).

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2004) reported that more girls than boys had started using alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana during their junior high school years. During 2004, an estimated 1.5 million girls began using alcohol, 730,000 girls began smoking, and 675,000 girls started using marijuana. Additionally the survey indicated girls outnumbered boys who used marijuana. Even more shocking is that an estimated 1.6 million girls reported experiencing at least one major depressive episode during 2004; that is more than double the number of boys who had stated they had experienced depressive episodes. Teenage females also outnumbered boys in their use of prescription drugs. The survey also concluded that more teenage girls use marijuana than cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, and all other illicit drugs combined.

Why are teenage girls so vulnerable to the use of drugs and alcohol? Key risk factors that influence substance abuse among teenage girls have been found to include depression, weight and physical appearance, sexual behavior and possible consequences of, anxiety, puberty, mental disorders, physical or sexual abuse, and stress (The

Commonwealth Fund, 1997). When alcohol was involved, girls became exceptionally susceptible to peer pressure. Teenage girls are more likely than boys to drink to fit in socially. Many times this social interaction has led to participation in sexual activity. Approximately 25% of ninth-grade girls surveyed in 2003 had used alcohol or drugs prior to or after their last sexual intercourse (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, YRBSS, 2003). The Kaiser Family Foundation (2002) reported that 25% of sexually active teens stated they had had unprotected sex because they were using drugs or drinking alcohol.

Schools are regularly faced with the problem of how to help students deal with the emotional and sometimes physical effects of entering into relationships with adults while still teenagers. Unfortunately, students enter into these relationships without realizing the challenges that lie ahead because of this decision. School organizations are reaching out to these students through counseling provided by school counselors, principals, and assistant principals (Flanagan et al., 1990).

Numerous teenage girls have said they lost their virginity while under the influence of alcohol. Many of those teenage girls became pregnant or did things they wouldn't have done had they been sober. A study of

unplanned pregnancies among females' ages 14-21 concluded

that approximately 33% had been drinking when they became

pregnant and 91% reported that the sex was unplanned

(Flanagan et al., 1990).

School Factors

Some students fit in easily, understand, and use the

structure and reward system of school organizations.

Sadly, there are other students who do not fit in, cannot

identify with, or who are not endorsed by the school

organization. They find neither a purpose nor a welcoming

safe school environment. "I see a lot of hurt in these

halls… kids are struggling, being harassed, ridiculed,

teased…" (Pierce, 2005, p.85-87). A major goal of school

organizations is to ensure that every student feels safe

and secure in the school setting. But, the fact is, though

usually unintentional, many students feel insecure or

rejected. Many times the students who feel rejected or left

out don't "buy in" to the school's values and mission

(Eckert, 1989).

"Classrooms are hothouses of student life where,

depending on particular combinations of environmental

conditions, students potentially blossom, merely survive,

choke or wither" (Pierce, 2005, p.11). Friends or peers are

extremely important. By the time children become teenagers, friends take precedence over all influences in students' lives (Newman, 2002). "It is below the surface… different personalities, different backgrounds, different views, different attitudes – all thrown together and unfortunately students clash and clash hard" (Pierce, p.212).

Students in Minnesota schools who were in the 6th, 9th, and 12th grades were administered The Minnesota Student Survey in 2001. Two questions specifically dealt with the problem of truancy. Students were asked about their attendance records for the past 30 days. Amazingly, 31% of students with special needs had skipped school in the past 30 days. According to this report, the students with special needs are twice as likely to become truant by missing 10 plus times a month as are students without special needs. The second question focused on students skipping school because they feared for their safety. Twelve and one quarter percent of students with special needs stated they had skipped school because they feared for their personal safety compared to only 5.5% of students without special needs. Again, this percentage is double that of students without special needs (Minnesota Department of Health, 2004).

The organizational culture, the structure of a school setting, and teacher-student relationships contribute to every student's educational experience. These characteristics also influence student absenteeism and truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Students who feel connected and have a sense that the school organization is working for them, with them, and on their behalf are more likely to stay connected with educators and to achieve the goals set forth in the curriculum. Students tend to become more engaged and to acquire more knowledge when instructors develop a positive relationship with them. Consequently, a negative teacher-student relationship allows for a greater understanding of the student's reason(s) for not learning (Kohl, 1991).

Research found positive correlations between student-teacher relationships and attendance. Studies have shown that student attendance increased after the implementation of mentor relationships, positive incentives and reinforcement, and engaging and relevant class assignments. The common practice of negative reinforcement has not improved attendance and often has increased the feelings of student obscurity and their absences from school (Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997). The same research implied providing students with a sense of worth and rewarding positive

attendance led to students being motivated to improve school attendance. Gullatt and Lemoine further stated, "It is the function of the school to become a place where students want to attend, not where they have to attend" (p. 23).

According to Armocida and Roby (2002), "Feeling safe at school, physically and psychologically, directly relates to students' feelings and beliefs about the teachers at the school" (p.29). Asher and Coie (1990) suggest that social withdrawal resulting from social anxiety and insecurity often contributes to the feeling of rejection. Some students who feel helpless and rejected at school may choose to withdraw from school rather than face their insecurities (Dreikers, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982).

Many students withdraw from the school organization when they do not feel the school organization is supporting them. Some attendance policies are ineffective and may encourage disconnectedness by rewarding the nonattendance of particular peer groups such as athletes. "It has become apparent that in order to combat truancy and absenteeism within some schools, it is first necessary to change students, parents, and teachers' attitudes towards these schools as well as pervading culture and ethos" (Reid, 2003, p.352). Attendance policies, in general, make a

distinction between peer groups by developing policies

around athletes with excused absences while not excusing

students who are simply "burned out". School organizations

legitimize the absences of school affiliated groups or

clubs even though the students' learning is nevertheless

reduced to make-up work and outside projects. Similarly,

students not participating in school affiliated absences

may have valid reasons for missing school. Many teenage

students are helping with childcare, taking care of ill

family members, working to compensate family income, or

participating in extra-curricular activities not directly

affiliated with the school organization, though of equal

importance to them (Reid).

Absenteeism and Academic Achievement

Research indicates that there is a correlation between

student attendance and academic achievement. Absenteeism

negatively impacts a student's performance on formal and

informal assessments, grade point averages, and class

grades. One report found "A student's absence is

negatively correlated to a student's standardized

achievement test score and warns policymakers that

habitually absent students need special attention" (Dunn,

2003, p.8). Anderson, Mitchell, and Butler state, "poor

academic effort and truancy… can affect academic

achievement" (1993, p.1). "Absenteeism is detrimental to

students' achievement" and "students who miss school fall

behind their peers…"(DeKalb, 1999, p.1). According to the

American Federation of Teachers (2007), "Students who do

not attend school are more likely to score poorly on tests

of achievement" (AFT, p.2). The above research findings

indicate in order for students to achieve greater academic

success they must attend school on a regular basis.

Family Aspects

Historically, students who were chronically absent

from school were considered delinquents or deviants.

Families were rarely involved until the attendance problem

became so severe that the students were failing their

classes. Educators now realize that families have a

tremendous impact on student attendance and are a vital

resource for decreasing chronic absences and truancy

(Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998).

According to Kinder, Wakefield, and Wilkin (1998),

based on their findings from the National Foundation for

Educational Research (NFER), blame for students being

truant rests largely on the parent(s). Their research

indicated students misbehave and become truant because they

are bored in school and that the national curriculum is failing to address the needs of these students. The parents in the study also blamed themselves, peer pressure, and a breakdown in student-teacher relationships. Of equal importance was their suggestion of bullying, boredom at home, lack of school discipline, and parental attitudes toward the school system (Kinder & Wilkin).

Reid (2002) said that there was no single category of parents whose children are truant from school. Parents of students who are truants often possess the characteristics of being antieducation, laissez-faire, frustrated, desperate, or unable to adjust to current situations. In some cases, frustrated parents who have appealed to administrators, guidance counselors, attendance officials, and other caring professionals at schools are still unable to insure that their child will attend school on a regular basis. There have been cases where the parents or guardians had transported their children to school and still the children managed to skip a class period or even the entire day. Malcolm's (2003) research indicated the following perceptions of parents regarding regular attendance…

> Most parents stated that children who did not attend school regularly would do badly in school work, and that it was necessary for children to get qualifications such as a high school diploma.

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Many parents said that missing school occasionally
would not harm a child's education.
Parents reported it was more acceptable to use school
time for doctors' appointments than for dentists'
appointments.

Parents of children with school attendance problems
were more likely to keep children away from school for
illness, family holidays, and doctor and dentist
appointments.

Parents of children with school attendance problems
were four times more likely to think that children
might have something more important to do at home than
at school.

Parents who were unhappy with their children's
attendance identified problems with teachers,
bullying, and peer pressure to stay away from school
as the main causes of truancy. Other parents added
problems with schoolwork to the list (Malcolm, p. 9).

Bullying

"Bullying has been a problem since a jealous Cain
murdered his brother, Abel…or since the first caveman
hit another over the head. Because children and youth
spend much of their time at school, that's where a lot
of bullying takes place—usually out of adults' sight
and hearing. Despite recent efforts to publicize the
problem, most bullying still goes unnoticed and
unreported" (Beane, 2000, p.1).

According to Spurling, in any school setting we all

need to "feel respected and work together in not tolerating

bullying behavior, to accept and appreciate differences,

and to care and look out for one another. Our 'Bully-Free'

goal is for children to come to school daily… excited,

enthused, ready to learn, and actively enjoying the

educational experience" (2004). What is a bully? Many
people think of a bully as the big kid of the class whom
the smaller children fear, who takes their lunch money, or
who forces, another student to do his or her homework for
him or her. The fact is that bullying not only is present
in school systems but also is visible throughout society.
There are bullies at school, in the workplace, on the
Internet, and even in the media. Cohn and Canter (2003)
reported that bullying was the most common form of violence
in our society; between 15% and 30% of students are bullies
or victims. A goal of educators is to provide an
environment where students feel safe and secure in the
learning experience. When bullying is present in the
school, students lose their feeling of security and often
skip class or miss the entire school day. Bullying is not
only the act of physically attacking another person. "A
bully is someone who directs physical, verbal, or
psychological aggression or harassment towards others, with
the goal of gaining power over or dominating another
individual" (Canter & Cohn, p.10). In order for bullying to
be present there has to be a victim involved. "A victim is
someone who repeatedly is exposed to aggression from peers
in the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults, or
psychological abuse" (Canter & Cohn, p.10). A commonality

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found amongst the literature reviewed for this study is that boys tend to be bullied more than do girls. The difference in the amount of bullying between girls and boys tends to decrease if indirect aggressions (threats) that girls are more likely to make are taken into account (Canter & Cohn).

Initiatives for Truancy Prevention

What can educators do to combat truancy problems in today's educational systems? The remainder of the literature review will discuss possible interventions, initiatives, and solutions to help educators battle against truancy in today's schools.

The Governor of New Mexico initiated a state Truancy Prevention Program to identify and implement successful programs for preventing truancy in educational facilities in 2003. The goals of this initiative are to decrease truancy rates, to decrease dropout rates, and to increase attendance rates among students. During the 2006-07 academic school years, seven school districts received funding to implement this program. The seven schools that received this funding were to implement "best practice programs and/or early intervention programs as required by the new Governor's Truancy Prevention Law (HB 106), some of

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which might build community collaborations among local

partners to carry out effective truancy prevention programs

and create systemic change at the local level" (Truancy

Prevention Final Report, 2007, p.4, TPFR).

The 2006-07-evaluation design included:

Finalization of indicators for the program combined
with the New Mexico Public Education Department,
including Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) statistics,
truancy data, attendance records, and high school
dropouts.

Analyzing changes in behavior regarding cause and
effects of truancy as perceived by teachers, parents,
students, and administration;

Providing professional development and technological
assistance;

Implementation and analyzing of pre-test and post-test
surveys;

Collaboration with the Public Education Department;

Preparation of an evaluation report (TPFR, p.4)

A survey entitled "New Mexico Youth; Views on Truancy"

was administered during the 2006-07 school year. The

purpose of this survey was to gain insight into student

perceptions of truancy as well as what was actually known

about truancy. Listed below are some of the findings from

the student survey…

56% stated they had never cut class or intentionally
skipped class;

38% stated they had skipped or cut class;

61% of students surveyed reported that truant students received worse grades than other students;

59% of students surveyed suggested that most parents do not know if their children are truant from school;

52% of students identified boring and uninteresting classes and reported that they felt teachers do not listen to them as the #1 reason students become truant. (TPFR, 2007, p.5)

According to the survey administered students identified boring and uninteresting classes and their feelings that teachers do not listen to them as the main reasons for truancy, both of which fall into the school factors category.

The initiative also called for principals to participate in a pretest and posttest survey. The pretest administered in fall 2006, indicated that 82% of administrators expected truancy rates would decrease. The posttest, administered in April 2007, indicated a decrease in their expectations that only 74% of administrators expected the truancy rate to decrease. Administrators implied the following possibilities could decrease truancy in their school:

Consistent truancy policies, procedures and practice

Enhanced enforcement of truancy policy

Increased awareness (parents, students, community) of truancy policy and issues

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Student motivation factors (TPFR, 2007, p.6)

Numerous actions or strategies were implemented in the hopes of preventing truancy in the seven schools. Schools enhanced policies and enforcement of policies regarding attendance. Schools increased student and family accountability regarding truancy. Schools developed and continually strengthened community partnerships. Schools implemented procedures for contacting parents and follow-up action with parents or guardians. Schools enhanced their relationships with legal professionals and court systems. Surprisingly, only 8% developed and implemented strategies to increase student motivation and teacher and student relationships (TPFR, 2007).

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) report three strategies that have proven to improve student attendance. First, schools must actively initiate the involvement of all educational stakeholders. Second, school organizations that focus more on positive rewards than punishment are generally more effective. Third, schools must set goals, remain focused, and assess the results over a lengthy period of time. The research suggests that truancy officers positively effected student attendance and parent or guardian accountability. Family involvement is another key

factor in improving student attendance. Families need to have an open line of communication and be made aware of attendance policies, procedures, and consequences. A great way to inform families if such is by conducting parent or guardian workshops (Epstein & Sheldon).

The majority of effective truancy reduction programs are derived from four components. One, parent or guardian involvement, or whole family involvement is essential. Two, a continuum of supports and incentives including meaningful rewards for good attendance and consequences for truants with their parents or guardians must be developed in order to improve student and teacher relationships. Three, partnerships between schools and all stakeholders including, but not limited to, law enforcement, court systems, mental health workers, mentors, social service providers, etc., must be developed and maintained. Finally, schools must share a vision, set measurable goals and objectives, record and analyze data collected, evaluate progress or lack thereof, and follow up (National Center for School Engagement, n.d.).

Summary

Research states that family, school-related, economic, and personal factors can cause absenteeism. Primary grade

students often experience absenteeism because of family-related routines or parental or guardian difficulties. Middle grade students and high school students often have personal and social reasons to become truant from school. School related factors of truancy include students whose friends are truants, poor relationships with faculty, staff, and administration, not engaged in the curriculum, and students who are avoiding being bullied or ridiculed. Economic factors that can affect student attendance include poverty, needed in family business, and students who must work to help support their family. Individual factors that affect school attendance include low self-esteem, alcohol or substance abuse, language barrier, and lack of adequate social skills. Finally, family factors that research stated affect student attendance in school include frequent housing moves, caring for younger siblings, lack of parental discipline, and parents lack of support for education (National Center for School Engagement, n.d.).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODLOGY

Focus of the Inquiry

The focus of my inquiry was to investigate student perceptions about school attendance and absenteeism. The study was conducted in one high school located in East Tennessee. All students at the focus school were given the opportunity to participate in the survey. Survey and open-ended questions were formulated from the following research questions and hypotheses:

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1 - What school factors are associated with school attendance according to student perceptions?

Ho1 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive the school administration cares when students miss school and students who perceive the administration does not care.

Ho2 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive teachers care if they miss school versus students who perceive teachers do not care if they miss school.

Ho3 There is no difference of days absent among students' grade levels.

Ho4 There is no difference in days absent between students who know the school's attendance policy and students who do not know the school's attendance policy.

Ho5 There is no difference in days absent between students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being effective and students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being ineffective.

Ho6 There is no difference between days absent and student perceptions of the school's consequences for being truant.

Ho7 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of the school rewarding students with good attendance.

Ho8 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of attendance affecting graduation.

Research Question 2 – What common variables, according to student perceptions, are associated with student school attendance?

Ho9 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students participating in substance abuse and students not participating in substance abuse.

Ho10 There is no difference in days absent and students'
method of transportation to school.

Ho11 There is no difference in the number of days absent of
students who feel safe at school and students who do not
feel safe at school.

Ho12 There is no difference in the number of absences from
school between students feeling pressured to skip class by
friends and students not feeling pressured to skip class
from friends.

Ho13 There is no difference in the number of days absent
between male and female students.

Ho14 There is no difference in the number of unexcused
absences between male and female students.

Ho15 There is no difference between male and female
students' main reason for school absences.

Ho16 There is no difference between the percentage of male
students who have skipped school and the percentage of
female students who have skipped school.

*Research Question 3 – What percentage of students
report missing class for the following reasons*; being
unprepared for class, conflict with teacher, and the result
of being bullied, to engage in sexual activity, or
perceived class as boring.

Research Design

A mixed methods model was determined to be the most appropriate way to conduct this study. Data were collected from two primary sources: survey and document review. The goal was to identify student perceptions regarding attendance. In an effort to acquire the perceptions of as many students as possible, a quantitative research instrument (survey) was used.

Participants

I contacted the Director of Schools, Assistant Director of Attendance and Discipline, and the High School Principal for permission to conduct research within the school system. I met with the administrative staff at the high school and set up a date and time to administer the survey followed by an agreeable interview time and place for the follow-up interviews. Following the conclusion of my research I agreed to make a presentation to the high school's faculty and the school system's attendance committee if so requested by the Director of Schools.

The participants of this study were students enrolled at one East Tennessee High School. The population consisted of 1,335 students. A letter of informed consent was sent home with all students and placed on the school website 1

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week prior to data collection explaining the purpose of the study and asking parents for permission to allow or decline their student to participate. A survey was distributed during school hours in homeroom to the entire student body. The total population was given the opportunity to participate in the study. Nine hundred sixteen surveys were completed for a return rate of 68.6%.

Successive Phases of the Inquiry

I obtained authorization from the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University (see Appendix A). The next step of the strategic inquiry process was to contact and receive permission from the director of the school system and principal of the focus school (see Appendices B and C). I developed a survey to administer to the entire student body (see Appendix E).

Instrumentation

A student survey instrument in the questionnaire format was used to measure perceptions and provide data for the study. Constructs were developed based on the literature review. I continued to study the constructs and then developed a list of attitudinal statements. A panel of educational administrators examined the survey for content

validity. The questionnaire was tested on students from another area school who are not members of the group of the surveyed. Suggestions for change were given from neither the educational administrators nor students. The students had similar characteristics in terms of culture, geographic area, and school system make-up. On the questionnaire, students were asked to read 24 closed form statements and respond to each. A demographic information section containing 10 questions was included in order to report findings and to give insight into possible connections to particular statements. The survey concluded with open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate on the subject of attendance.

Documents were reviewed to compare three academic years of attendance records of students located in the school that is the subject of this study. I reviewed documents chosen by the protocol of purposeful sampling to ensure the documents were directly related to the research topic. I reviewed the school system's attendance policy, the high school's attendance policy, and attendance records for the 3 previous academic school years. According to Creswell (1998), "The qualitative approach allows the researcher to study things in their natural settings,

attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.15).

Data Collection

A letter of informed consent, introduction to the study, and the survey were distributed to the student body (See Appendices A, D, & E). Demographic information was collected and a semantic differential scale was used to identify the survey data collected. Student participants were assured of confidentiality. Nine hundred sixteen surveys were returned out of 1,335 distributed which made for a 68.6% return.

The qualitative approach offered flexibility to pursue popular responses to the student surveys. Through open-ended questions, participants were given ample opportunities to provide their own insight.

Data Analysis

Survey

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data in this study. The data collected from the survey results were analyzed by computer using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program

procedures. Students were asked to read a statement and to respond using the following format: yes or no.

Inferential statistical procedures were used using SPSS for testing the null hypotheses. The Chi Square test was used to evaluate 15 of the 16 null hypotheses. A t test for independent samples was used to evaluate Ho14. Because the sample size (N = 913) was so large and because there is an inverse relationship between the sample size and magnitude of the probability, the preset alpha for this study was set to .001.

Document Reviews

The authenticity and nature of the documents were assessed. Content analysis is a systematic procedure for describing the content for communication. The data collected from the document review provides descriptive information. Document review is a meaningful addition to this case study. The documents I reviewed allowed me the opportunity to look at similarities and differences as well as points of uniqueness within three academic school years.

Insuring Trustworthiness, Reliability, Validity

The analysis of the survey development study was a statistical foundation for the final development of the

survey instrument. Credibility was enhanced through

piloting the survey instrument on a group of high school

students not associated with the focus school. The names of

the people surveyed, as well as the name of the school that

was the focus of research, have been replaced with

pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants and to

assure their continued anonymity. The external validity has

been enhanced because readers of the research have been

provided with enough descriptive information that they can

relate their perceptions to the research findings and to

make informative decisions based on those findings (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to investigate student
perceptions about school attendance. The data collected
from this study were collected from school attendance
records and surveys distributed to 1,335 high school
students in northeast Tennessee. The survey consisted of 7
demographic questions and 29 attitudinal statements
relating to student perceptions of school attendance. Seven
open-ended questions were asked to allow students to
comment on particular questions concerning school
attendance.

Respondents

Nine hundred sixteen students completed the survey.
This figure represented 68.6% of the total student
population. Respondents completed the surveys on Tuesday,
December 16, 2008, during second period class.

Document Review

Three years of student service records of the focus
school were reviewed to gain insight into their school
attendance. During the 2005-2006 school year, 45% of

students enrolled at the focus school had 10+ absences from school. Forty-two percent of the 45% violated the school's attendance policy; therefore, failing academically because of attendance violations. Seven percent of students enrolled were sent to Truancy Board and 13 juvenile petitions were filed in Juvenile Court due to attendance violations.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 43% of students enrolled at the focus school had 10+ absences from school. Fifty-five percent of the 43% violated the school's attendance policy; therefore, failing academically because of attendance violations. Five percent of students enrolled were sent to Truancy Board and 32 juvenile petitions were filed in Juvenile Court due to attendance violations.

During the 2007-2008 school year 39% of students enrolled at the focus school had 10+ absences. Forty-three percent of the 39% violated the school's attendance policy therefore, failing academically because of attendance violations. Five percent of students enrolled were sent to Truancy Board and 45 juvenile petitions were filed due to attendance violations.

Analysis of Data

The three research questions presented in Chapter 1 were used to guide the study. The 16 hypotheses presented in Chapter 3 were used to test the data.

Research Question 1

What school factors are associated with student school attendance according to student perceptions?

Ho1 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive the school administration cares when students miss school and students who perceive the administration does not care.

There was no difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive the school administration cares when students miss school and students who perceive the school administration does not care, χ^2 (2) = 8.93, *p* = .01.Because the probability of .01 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.10). Table 1 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students' perceptions of whether or not the school administration cares when students miss school.

Table 1
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Perceptions of Whether or Not the School
Administration Cares About Absences

My school administrator cares when I miss school	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	326	56.0	158	47.9
Absent 5 – 10 days	209	35.9	128	38.8
Absent more than 10 days	47	8.1	44	13.3
Total	582	100.0	330	100.0

As shown above in Table 1, 56% of students who perceive the school administration cares had 0-4 absences opposed to 47.9% of students who perceived the school administration does not care if they miss school.

Ho2 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive teachers care if they miss school versus students who perceive teachers don't care if they miss school.

There was a difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive teachers care if they miss school and students who perceive that teachers do not care if they miss school, χ^2 (2) = 15.36, p < .001. Because the probability of <.001 was less than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was rejected. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.13). Table 2 shows the cross-

tabulated table for the number of days absent by students'

perception of whether or not teachers care when students

miss school.

Table 2
*Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Perceptions of Whether or Not Teachers Care About
Absences*

My teacher(s) care when I miss school	Yes		No	
	n	%	*n*	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	322	57.9	162	45.5
Absent 5 – 10 days	190	34.2	147	37.0
Absent more than 10 days	44	7.9	47	13.2
Total	556	100.0	356	100.0

As shown above in Table 2, 57.9% of students who

perceive teachers care if they miss school had 0-4 absences

opposed to 45.5% of students who perceived teachers don't

care if they miss school. Table 2 also shows that the

percentage of students who perceived teachers care about

absences decreased as school absences increased.

Ho3 There is no difference of days absent among

students' grade levels.

There was no difference in the number of days absent

among students' grade levels, χ^2 (6) = 22.37, *p* = .001.

Because the probability of .001 was equal to the preset

alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The

measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V,

showed the relationship was weak (.11). Table 6 shows the

cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by

students' grade level.

Table 3
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Grade Level

Days Absent	Freshman		Sophomore		Junior		Senior	
	n	%	*n*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	182	60.5	134	51.3	128	49.6	41	44.1
Absent 5 – 10 days	95	31.6	109	41.8	99	38.4	34	36.6
Absent more than 10 days	24	8.0	18	6.9	31	12.0	18	19.4
Total	301	100	261	100	258	100	93	100

As shown in Table 3, 60.5 % of freshman had 0-4

absences, while 44.1% of seniors had 0-4 absences. On the

other hand, only 8% of freshman had 10 or more absences

compared to 19.4% of seniors who had 10 or more absences.

Table 6 also shows that the percentage of students with 10

or more absences increases among junior and senior

students.

Ho4 There is no difference in days absent between

students who know the school's attendance policy and

students who do not know the school's attendance policy.

There was no difference in the number of days absent

between students who know the school's attendance policy

and students who do not know the school's attendance

policy, $\chi^2(2) = 1.21$, $p = .55$. Because the probability of .55 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.04). Table 4 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students' perception of the school's attendance policy.

Table 4
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Students' Perceptions of the School's Attendance Policy

I know my school's attendance policy.	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	455	53.6	30	46.9
Absent 5 – 10 days	311	36.6	26	40.6
Absent more than 10 days	83	9.8	8	12.5
Total	849	100.0	64	100.0

As shown above in Table 4, 53.6% of students who know the school's attendance policy had 0-4 absences, while 46.9% of students who did not know the school's attendance policy had 0-4 absences.

Ho5 There is no difference in days absent between students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being effective and student's who perceive the school's attendance policy as being ineffective.

There was a difference in the number of days absent between students who perceive the school's attendance

policy as being effective and students who perceive the

school's attendance policy as being ineffective, χ^2 (2) =

29.30, p < .001. Because the probability of <.001 was less

than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was

rejected. The measure of the strength of the relationship,

Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.18). Table 5

shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days

absent by students' perception of whether or not the

school's attendance policy is effective.

Table 5
*Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Perceptions of Whether or Not the School's
Attendance Policy Is Effective*

My school's attendance policy is effective	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	343	56.2	142	44.9
Absent 5 - 10 days	229	37.5	108	35.6
Absent more than 10 days	38	6.2	53	17.5
Total	610	100.0	303	100.0

As shown above in Table 5, 56.2% of students perceive

the school's policy as being effective had 0-4 absences,

while 44.9% of students who do not perceive their school's

attendance policy as being effective had 0-4 absences.

Ho6 There is a difference between days absent and

student perceptions of the school's consequences for being

truant.

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There was no difference in the number of days absent between student perceptions of the school's consequences of being truant, $\chi^2(2) = .58$, $p = .75$. Because the probability of .75 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.03). Table 6 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students' perceptions of the school's consequences for being truant.

Table 6
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Students' Perceptions of the School's Consequences for Being Truant

My school has consequences for being truant.	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	394	53.0	91	53.8
Absent 5 - 10 days	278	37.4	59	34.9
Absent more than 10 days	72	9.7	19	11.2
Total	744	100.0	169	100.0

As shown above in Table 6, 53% of students said the school has consequences for being truant had 0-4 absences, while 53.8% of students said the school does not have consequences for being truant had 0-4 absences.

Ho7 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of the school rewarding students with good attendance.

There was no difference in the number of days absent between student perceptions of the school rewarding students with good attendance, χ^2(2) = .29, p = .87. Because the probability of .87 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.02). Table 7 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students' perceptions of the school rewarding students with good attendance.

Table 7
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Students' Perceptions of the School Rewarding Students With Good Attendance

My school rewards students for good attendance.	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	253	53.7	232	52.5
Absent 5 - 10 days	170	36.1	167	37.8
Absent more than 10 days	48	10.2	43	9.7
Total	471	100.0	442	100.0

As shown above in Table 7, 53.7% of students said the school rewards students for good attendance had 0-4 absences, while 52.5% of students said the school does not reward students for good attendance had 0-4 absences.

Ho8 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of attendance affecting graduation.

There was a difference in the number of days absent between student perceptions of attendance affecting graduation, χ^2 (2) = 19.38, p < .001. Because the probability of <.001 was less than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was rejected. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.15). Table 8 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students' perception of attendance affecting graduation.

Table 8
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Students' Perceptions of Attendance Affecting Graduation

I am worried that my absences will affect my chance to graduate.	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	171	46.6	314	57.6
Absent 5 - 10 days	142	38.7	194	35.6
Absent more than 10 days	54	14.7	37	6.8
Total	367	100.0	545	100.0

As shown above in Table 8, 46.6% of students worry that absences will affect graduation had 0-4 absences, while 57.6% of students do not worry that absences will affect graduation had 0-4 absences.

Research Question 2

What common variables, according to student perceptions, are associated with student school attendance?

Ho9 There is no difference in the number of days absent between students participating in substance abuse and students not participating in substance abuse.

There was a difference in the number of days absent between students participating in substance abuse and students not participating in substance abuse, $\chi^2 (2) = 40.31$, *p* < .001. Because the probability of <.001 was less than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was rejected. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak but definite (.21). Table 9 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent by students participating in substance abuse and students not participating in substance abuse.

Table 9

Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by Students
Participating in Substance Abuse and Students Not
Participating in Substance Abuse

I have skipped school because of alcohol and/or drug use.	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	29	29.0	456	56.2
Absent 5 – 10 days	46	46.0	290	35.7
Absent more than 10 days	25	25.0	66	8.1
Total	100	100.0	812	100.0

As shown above in Table 9, 29.0% of students who participated in substance abuse had 0-4 absences, while 56.2% of students who did not participate in substance abuse had 0-4 absences. On the other hand, 25% of students who participated in substance abuse had 10 or more absences, while 8.1% of students who did not participate in substance abuse had 10 or more absences.

Ho10 There is no difference in days absent and students' method of transportation to school.

There was no difference in the number of days absent between students' method of transportation to school, $\chi^2(6)$ = 7.30, *p* = .29. Because the probability of .29 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.06). Table

10 shows the cross-tabulated table for the number of days

absent by students' method of transportation to school.

Table 10
*Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Method of Transportation to School*

Method of Transportation to School	Bus		Drive Myself		Parents		Ride with Friends	
Days Absent	n	%	N	% %	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	197	54.9	146	53.1	81	58.3	53	43.4
Absent 5 – 10 days	129	35.9	99	36.0	47	33.8	56	45.9
Absent more than 10 days	33	9.2	30	10.9	11	7.9	13	10.7
Total	359	100	275	100	139	100	122	100

As shown above in Table 10, for each of the three

ranges of absences, the percentages of students in the four

methods of transportation are similar.

Ho11 There is no difference in the number of days

absent of students who feel safe at school and students who

do not feel safe at school.

There was no difference in the number of days absent

between students who feel safe at school and students who

do not feel safe at school, $\chi^2 (2) = 3.97$, *p* = .14. Because

the probability of .14 was greater than the preset alpha of

.001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the

strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the

relationship was weak (.07). Table 11 shows the cross-

tabulated table for the number of days absent by students'

who feel safe at school and students who do not feel safe

at school.

Table 11
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Perceptions of Feeling Safe at School

I feel safe at school	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	348	54.0	137	50.9
Absent 5 – 10 days	240	37.3	97	36.1
Absent more than 10 days	56	8.7	35	13.0
Total	644	100.0	269	100.0

As shown above in Table 11, 8.7% of students feeling

safe at school had 10 or more absences, while 13% of

students' not feeling safe at school had 10 or more

absences. On the other hand, 37.3% of students feeling safe

at school had 5-10 absences, while 36.1% of students who

did not feel safe at school had 5-10 absences.

Ho12 There is no difference in the number of absences

from school between students feeling pressured to skip

class from friends and students not feeling pressured to

skip class from friends.

There was no difference in the number of days absent

between students feeling pressured to skip class from

friends and students not feeling pressured to skip class

from friends, χ^2 (2) = .91, p = .63. Because the probability

of .63 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null

hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the

relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak

(.03). Table 12 shows the cross-tabulated table for the

number of days absent by students' feeling pressured to

skip class from friends and students not feeling pressured

to skip class from friends.

Table 12
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent by
Students' Feeling Pressured to Skip Class From Friends

I feel pressured to skip class from my friends.	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	64	57.1	421	52.6
Absent 5 – 10 days	37	33.0	300	37.5
Absent more than 10 days	11	9.8	80	10.0
Total	112	100.0	801	100.0

As shown above in Table 12, 33% of students who feel

pressured to skip class from friends had 5-10 absences,

while 37.5% of students not feeling pressured to skip class

from friends had 5-10 absences.

Ho13 There is no difference in the number of days

absent between male and female students.

There was no difference in the number of days absent

between male and female students, $\chi^2(2) = .88$, $p = .64$.

Because the probability of .64 was greater than the preset

75

alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The

measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V,

showed the relationship was weak (.03). Table 13 shows the

cross-tabulated table for the number of days absent between

male and female students.

Table 13
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent Between
Male and Female Students

Gender	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Absent 0 – 4 days	235	54.7	248	51.6
Absent 5 – 10 days	154	35.8	183	38.0
Absent more than 10 days	41	9.5	50	10.4
Total	430	100.0	481	100.0

As shown above in Table 13, 35.8% of male students had

5-10 absences, while 38% of female students had 5-10

absences.

Ho14 There is no difference in the number of unexcused

absences between males and females.

There was no difference in the number of unexcused

absences between males and females, t (895) = .13, p = .90.

The effect size, as measured by η^2, was .00. That is, none

of the variance in unexcused absences was accounted for by

gender. The mean number of unexcused absences for males (*M*

= 3.50, *SD* = 4.95) was virtually identical to the mean

number of unexcused absences for females (M = 3.46, SD = 4.50).

Ho15 There is no difference between male and female students' main reason for school absences.

There was a difference between male and female students' main reason for school absences, χ^2 (6) = 28.52, p < .001. Because the probability of <.001 was less than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was rejected. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.18). Table 14 shows the cross-tabulated table between male and female students' main reason for school absences.

Table 14
Cross Tabulated Table for Number of Days Absent between Male and Female Students' Main Reason for School Absences

What was the main reason for absences?	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Sick	243	58.4	305	67.2
Pregnant	2	.5	12	2.6
Doctor or Dentist Appointment	51	12.3	62	13.7
Court	13	3.1	9	2.0
Death in Family	9	2.2	13	2.5
Out of Town	21	5.0	12	3.8
Other	77	18.5	41	13.6
Total	416	100.0	454	100.0

As shown above in Table 14, sickness was the reason 58.4% of male students missed school, while sickness was the reason 67.2% of female students missed school. Table 14 showed that 2 boys indicated they missed school because of pregnancy. They probably did so because they impregnated a female.

Ho16 There is no difference between the percentage of male students who have skipped school and the percentage of female students who have skipped school.

There was no difference between the percentage of male students who have skipped school and the percentage of female students who have skipped school, χ^2 (1) = .36, p = .55. Because the probability of .55 was greater than the preset alpha of .001, the null hypothesis was retained. The measure of the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V, showed the relationship was weak (.02). Table 15 shows the cross-tabulated table between the percentage of male students who have skipped school and the percentage of female students who have skipped school.

Table 15
Cross Tabulated Table Between Male and Female Students Who
Have Skipped School

Have you ever skipped school?	Male		Female	
	⌡	%	n	%
Yes	212	49.3	228	48.2
No	218	50.7	254	51.8
Total	430	100.0	482	100.0

As shown in Table 15, 49.3% of male students had
skipped school, while 48.2% of female students had skipped
school.

Research Question Three

What percentage of students report missing class for
the following reasons: being unprepared for class, conflict
with teacher, a result of being bullied, to engage in
sexual activity, or perceived class as boring.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze this data
using percentages and accounts. Five hundred fifty-nine
(61.1%) students said they had missed class because they
were not prepared for class. Two hundred forty-six (26.9%)
students said they had missed class because they perceived
class as boring. One hundred thirty-nine (15.2%) students
said they had missed class because of a conflict with a
teacher. Seventy-three (8.0%) students said they had

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missed class because they were being bullied. One hundred

thirty-one (14.3%) students said they missed a class

because they were engaging in sexual activity.

Open-Ended Questions

The survey concluded with open-ended questions to

allow students to expand on their feelings towards school

attendance.

Survey question 20, what did you do when you skipped

school? Two hundred fifty-four student respondents

answered with the following responses:

    43% of students stayed home

    35% of students slept

    21% of students were hanging out with friends

    7% of students reported they were engaged in sexual
    activity

    7% of students were participating in alcohol and drug
    use

    4% of students were hanging out in another classroom

    4% of students were vacationing with family

    3% of students skipped because they were unprepared
    for class

    2% of students were caring for their own child

    2% of students were caring for a sick family member

    Less than 1% of students reported the following: got
    naked; worked on my car; walked around school; sat in

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the baseball dugout all day; sat outside; instead of catching the bus I hid in my father's old truck; went to visit my teachers at the elementary and middle schools; went to the lake; or went to the "titty" bar.

Another student answered, "I got off the bus and got in the car with a friend and her boyfriend and he dropped us off at the gas station and left. We got caught."

Survey question 23 was asked of students who had been sent to Truancy Board, did Truancy Board change the way you think about being truant from school? Forty-six student respondents answered with the following responses:

24% of students said "yes, Truancy Board made them scared to miss school again"

11% of students said "yes, Truancy Board changed their thinking about missing school because they were sent to Juvenile Court"

11% of students said "yes, Truancy Board changed their mind about missing school because they had to go to summer school"

11% of students said "yes, Truancy Board was a warning that if they continued to miss school their parents or guardians could be sent to jail"

11% of students said "yes, Truancy Board made them realize their future"

9% of students said "yes, Truancy Board made me realize if I continue to miss school I could be sent to court"

9% of students said "yes, Truancy Board warned them that absences could keep them from graduating on time"

4% of students said yes, Truancy Board was a warning that "if I continued to skip school I could be taken out of the home."

2% of students said "yes, because they were sent to Moral Kombat"

2% of students said "yes, Truancy Board was what got them placed in Juvenile Detention"

2% of students said no, Truancy Board did not make them change the way they think about missing school stating, "I don't think people should have to go to school. Some people have major problems to deal with."

2% of students said no, Truancy Board did not change my mind because, "it is not my fault I am sick a lot."

2% of students said no, one student stated, "The current truancy board is trying to put all students on one category. Students who missed schools because they were "high" are treated the same as those who lost family members."

Survey question 26 asked, "Is there anything you think schools can do to keep students from skipping school?" Two hundred fifty-two student respondents answered with the following responses:

35% of students suggested making classes more interesting

10% of students suggested taking a close look at replacing some "bad" teachers with teachers who are compassionate and will respect the students for who they are

8% of students suggested a later start time (8:45)

8% of students suggested offering better attendance incentives and rewards

6% of students suggested a free day or 6 weeks reward for students with good grades and good attendance

6% of students suggested closer adult supervision, especially in the hallways, and more discipline actions

5% of students suggested more communication with families

4% of students suggested strict enforcement of current attendance policy

3% of students suggested more time between classes

3% of students suggested a daycare is needed for students' children

2% of students suggested less homework, "Teachers need to discuss the amount of homework they are giving and not pile on every subject at once."

2% of students suggested offering more classes of interest, "We need a forensic science class so I can get a head start on my future career."

2% of students suggested new sports/extra-curricular activities

2% of students suggested faculty to stop being so strict on the "silly" things

1% of students suggested longer lunch sessions

1% of students suggested keeping truant students from graduating on time

1% of students suggested allowing the use of smokeless tobacco for students who are at least 18

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain and analyze data about the perceptions of students enrolled in an East Tennessee High School concerning school attendance.

The population was 1,335 high school students who had the opportunity to participate in the research project by completing a survey. Of these, 68.6% returned the survey. The 916 responses were completed during second period classes. Data from the respondents were organized and analyzed in three groupings: students with 0-4 absences from school, students with 5-9 absences from school, and students with 10 or more absences from school. Twenty-five hypotheses were tested using computerized findings provided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Research Question 1

What school factors are associated with school attendance according to student perceptions?

Eight hypotheses were used to test data for research question 1. The hypotheses were written in the null form

for testing. Two hypotheses were rejected and six

hypotheses were retained.

Hypotheses

Ho1 There is no difference in the number of days

absent between students who perceive the school

administration cares when students miss school and students

who perceive the administration does not care.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I

retained the null that no significant difference was found

in the number of days absent between students who perceive

the school administration cares when students miss school

and students who perceive the administration does not care.

Ho2 There is no difference in the number of days

absent between students who perceive teachers care if they

miss school versus students who perceive teachers don't

care if they miss school.

Hypothesis 2 revealed that the percentage of students

who perceived teachers care about absences decreased as

school absences increased.

Ho3 There is no difference of days absent among

students' grade levels.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found of days absent among students' grade levels.

Ho4 There is no difference in days absent between students who know the school's attendance policy and students' who do not know the school's attendance policy.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found of days absent based on students' knowledge of the attendance policy.

Ho5 There is no difference in days absent between students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being effective and students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being ineffective.

Hypothesis 5 was rejected revealing the percentage of students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being effective decreases as the number of days absent increases.

Ho6 There is a difference between days absent based on student perceptions of the school's consequences for being truant.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found

of days absent based on students' perceptions of consequences for being truant.

Ho7 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of the school rewarding students with good attendance.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found of days absent based on the school rewarding students with good attendance.

Ho8 There is no difference in days absent between student perceptions of attendance affecting graduation.

Hypothesis 8 was rejected revealing a larger percentage of students perceive absences from school will affect graduation.

Research Question 2

What common variables, according to student perceptions, are associated with student school attendance?

Seven hypotheses were used to test data for research question 2. The hypotheses were written in the null form for testing. All seven hypotheses were retained.

Hypotheses

Ho9 There is no difference in days absent and students' method of transportation to school.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found in days absent based on method of transportation of students to school.

Ho10 There is no difference in the number of days absent of students who feel safe at school and students who do not feel safe at school.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found in the number of days absent based on students feeling safe at school.

Ho11 There is no difference in the number of absences from school between students feeling pressured to skip class by friends based on students not feeling pressured to skip class by friends.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found in days absent between students feeling pressured to skip class from friends and students not skipping school because they feel pressured by friends.

Ho12 There is no difference in the number of days absent between male and female students.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found in days absent between male and female students.

Ho13 There is no difference in the number of unexcused absences between males and females.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference was found in unexcused days absent between male and female students.

Ho14 There is no difference between male and female students' main reason for school absences.

Hypothesis 14 was retained revealing that sickness was the main reason both male and female students were absent from school.

Ho15 There is no difference between male and female students that have skipped school and between male and female students who have not skipped school.

The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, I retained the null that no significant difference found between the percentage of male and female students that have skipped school and the percentage of male and female students that have not skipped school.

Conclusions

1. The percentage of students who perceive teachers care about absences decreased as school absences increased. Researchers Epstein and Sheldon (2002) indicated that students who feel connected and have a sense that the school organization is working with them and for them are more likely to attend school.

2. The percentage of students who perceive the school's attendance policy as being effective decreases as the number of days absent increases.

3. Gender does not impact the number of days absent from school. Male and female students revealed the main reason for missing school was due to sickness.

4. The likelihood of students engaging in substance abuse increased as the number of absences increased. A research survey by Halfors (2002) indicated that truancy is a good indicator of student drug use.

5. The majority of students who skipped school reported staying at home and sleeping as the top two activities they participated in while missing school. Malcolm's (2003) research indicated many parents perceived that students "missing school occasionally would not harm a child's education" (p.9). The same research indicated, "Parents of students with attendance problems often

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thought their children might have something more

important to do at home rather than attend school"

(p.9).

6. The majority of students sent to Truancy Board
   indicated Truancy Board positively impacted the way
   they perceive being truant from school. Researchers
   Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggest that truancy
   officers and truancy programs positively affected
   student attendance and parent or guardian
   accountability.

7. Students perceive that teachers making class more
   interesting would have a positive affect on school
   attendance. Fifty-two percent of students identified
   boring and uninteresting classes as a reason to become
   truant from school (TPER, 2007).

8. Students perceive that teachers modeling respect and
   compassion for students would positively impact school
   attendance.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed as a result
if this study of students' perceptions concerning
attendance at school.

1. Communication between schools and families of students concerning attendance needs to increase by newsletters, phone contact, email, school website, and home visits, etc. Researchers Epstein and Sheldon (2002) indicated that family involvement is a key factor in improving student attendance. It is essential to have an open line of communication between families and school organizations.

2. Schools should revisit attendance policies annually ensuring that policies are strictly enforced. The National Center of School Engagement (n.d.) indicates school must share a vision, set measurable goals and objectives, record and analyze data collected, evaluate progress or lack thereof, reflect, and follow up. Additional measures should be put in place to ensure that schools are abiding by the attendance policy set forth by the district and state administration.

3. Schools need to provide professional development for teachers on building relationships with students and families. Team-buildings activities should be incorporated during faculty meetings. Research by Gullatt and Lemoine (1997) found positive correlations

between attendance and student-teacher relationships and attendance.

4. Teachers need to participate in professional development that targets how to facilitate a cooperative learning environment with a goal of making classes more interactive and interesting. Researchers Gullatt and Lemoine (1997) indicate an increase in school attendance after the implementation of mentor relationships, positive incentives and reinforcement, and engaging and relevant class assignments. "It is the function of the school to become a place where students want to attend, not where they have to attend" (p.23).

5. Schools need to consider implementing end of grading period celebrations and activities for students with good attendance. One suggestion for implementing such a policy would be not only target students with perfect attendance but also target students with fewer than two excused absences for the grading period. Research by Gullatt and Lemoine (1997) implied, by providing students with a sense of worth and rewarding positive attendance, students become motivated to improve school attendance.

6. Schools should consider implementing attendance make-up days throughout the school year for students to make-up unexcused absences. Suggestions for such a policy could include Saturday make-up days and make-up sessions during fall, winter, and spring breaks facilitated by licensed teachers on extended contract. These days should focus not only on making up time missed in school but focus on academics missed due to absences. A suggestion would be to incorporate the use of lessons using computer technology to implement academic lessons students must complete during make-up sessions.

7. Schools need to consider implementing a Freshman Academy to not only target at-risk students but take a proactive approach to attendance, academics, and the building of relationships within a learning community as students are beginning the high school experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Is attendance a problem in all schools?

2. Compare student attendance in high-low economic schools.

3. Does student attendance at school affect grades?

4. Do students who have jobs affect school attendance?

5. Compare living situations (one parent, both parents, no parents, etc.) and student attendance at school.

6. Is truancy a symptom rather than the problem? Are teachers and administrators in the best position to make change?

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

  Your child has the opportunity to participate in a confidential research study about student perceptions regarding school attendance that is being conducted by Selina Blevins, doctoral candidate at East Tennessee State University. This study is being focused on your child's school and this is why your child has been selected to participate.

    Your child's involvement in this study is optional and will consist of the following. Students will be asked to complete a short survey, during homeroom, about what they think about school attendance. Students' responses to the surveys will be kept confidential. These surveys are a part of a study being conducted at the student's school by Selina Blevins of East Tennessee State University with the hopes of gaining insight and possible strategies to improve attendance at the focus school and other similar schools. All data collected will be kept confidential.   The result of this study may be used to develop strategies/programs to improve student attendance at school.

    Students may choose not to participate in the survey without any penalty. All students choosing to participate may enter their name in a drawing for three cash prizes $50, $25, and $20 using the enclosed entry ticket. The cash drawing will be held before the data on the surveys is analyzed. After the drawing, the entry tickets will be shredded to assure participant privacy is maintained and cannot be linked to the student surveys.

    Please contact me with any questions. I can be reached at 423-753-1130. If for any reason you feel that you do not wish for your child to participate in this study, please return this paper with your signature below by _____.

Sincerely,
Selina Blevins
ETSU Doctoral Candidate

I DO NOT wish for my child to participate in this study.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Printed Name: _____

Child's Name: _____

APPENDIX B

Director Letter of Request

Dear Director of Schools,

As a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, I am interested in conducting a study within your school district to explore the perceptions of students regarding school attendance. The study will involve surveying students, reviewing attendance policies, and reviewing attendance records.

If your permission is granted to conduct the study, please be assured that all confidentiality measures will be followed. Great consideration will be taken to limit disruption of the school environment. Please note that the identity of students and the school system will be protected in the reporting of the research findings. A copy of the information obtained will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at 423-753-1130. If you agree to allow me to conduct the research as stated above, please sign the attached form and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Selina Blevins
Doctoral Student
East Tennessee State University

Permission for Attendance Study

The signature on this form gives permission for Selina Blevins to conduct a study

regarding student attendance at _____ during the

2008-2009 school year. I realize the researcher will be surveying students and

reviewing documents to gather data. I give permission for the research to take place

as long as participants may choose whether to participate of their own free will. In

addition, no information may be included in the final report of the study that

designates student names or identifies the school or school system. I have been

informed that a copy of the research findings will be available for me.

_____
Signature of Director of Schools/Date

APPENDIX C

Principal Letter of Request

Dear Principal,

As a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University, I am interested in conducting a study within your school organization to explore the perceptions of students regarding school attendance. The study will involve surveying students, reviewing attendance policies, and reviewing attendance records.

If your permission is granted to conduct the study, please be assured that all confidentiality measures will be followed. Great consideration will be taken to limit disruption of the school environment. Please note that the identity of students and the school system will be protected in the reporting of the research findings. A copy of the information obtained will be provided to you at the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at 423-753-1130. If you agree for me to conduct the research as stated above, please sign the attached form and return it to me in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Selina Blevins
Doctoral Student
East Tennessee State University

Permission for Attendance Study

The signature on this form gives permission for Selina Blevins to conduct a study regarding student attendance at _____. I realize the researcher will be surveying students and reviewing documents to gather data. I give permission for the research to take place as long as participants may choose whether to participate of their own free will. In addition, no information may be included in the final report of the study that designates student names or identifies the school or school system. I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be made available to me.

_____
Signature of Principal

APPENDIX D

STUDENT SURVEY ON ATTENDANCE

Dear Students,

    My name is Selina Blevins. Many of you know me as one
of last year's Attendance Officials. This year I am the
Assistant Principal of Lamar School. I am also a student
at East Tennessee State University where I am pursuing a
Doctorate in Educational Leadership. In order to achieve
this degree I have to complete a research project. I have
decided to research what you think about school attendance.
Please take a few minutes to complete the survey. I
greatly appreciate any information you are willing to share
with me. I've come to know quite a few of you. Those of
you who know me; know that I care and listen to what you
have to say. Any information that you share with me is
confidential and strictly for research purposes. Please be
assured that no students, parents, teachers,
administrators, etc. names will be mentioned in any part of
the published information.
    Please note that your participation in the survey is
strictly voluntary. The surveys will be placed in a large
envelope and given to the teachers. Every teacher in the
building will be given a large envelope for students to
return the surveys. The teacher will choose a student to
pass out the surveys and inform students that participation
is voluntary. Students will have until the end of the day
to place the survey back into one of the large envelopes.
Students will circle/check the appropriate answer on each
question and have the option to freely respond to 5 open-
ended questions. At the end of the day the teacher will
choose a student to return the envelopes to the office and
place them in a drop box. Should you not get the survey
completed or if you would like to take it home; I will
leave a drop box in the office for 3 days. If you choose to
not participate simply return the survey incomplete,
destroy the survey, or simply request to not participate.
    Thank you for taking your time and effort to complete
this survey. Every student who completes this survey and
turns it in; may fill out an entry ticket for a chance to
be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 3 cash prizes
including $50, $25, and $20. I wish each of you the very
best throughout this school year and in life.

                        Thank you!!
                        Mrs. Selina Blevins

Student Survey on Attendance

Demographics – Please circle or fill-in an answer for each question.

1. Age: _____

2. Ethnicity:

   ____ 1. Caucasian
   ____ 2. African American
   ____ 3. Hispanic
   ____ 4. Asian
   ____ 5. Other

3. Transportation to/from school:

   ____ 1. Bus
   ____ 2. Drive Myself
   ____ 3. Parents
   ____ 4. Ride with friend(s)

4. Gender:

   ____ 1. Male
   ____ 2. Female

5. Grade Level 2008-2009 School Year:

   ____ 1. Freshman
   ____ 2. Sophomore
   ____ 3. Junior
   ____ 4. Senior

6. Approximately how many days of school were you absent during the 2007-2008 school year?

   ____ 1. 0 days   ____ 4. 10 days   ____ 7. 25+ days
   ____ 2. 1 - 4 days   ____ 5. 15 days
   ____ 3. 5 – 9 days   ____ 6. 20 days

7. Approximately how many of the above absences were considered unexcused? _____

8. What was the main reason for missing on the above days?

   ____ 1. Sick   ____ 4. Court   ____ 7. Other
   ____ 2. Pregnant   ____ 5. Death in family
   ____ 3. Dr./Dentist Appointment   ____ 6. Out of town

Please check the box under the answer that best describes your feelings.

Statements	YES	NO
1. I arrive at school on time.		
2. I know my school's attendance policy.		
3. My parents know when I am tardy		
4. I feel pressured to skip class from my friends.		
5. My school's attendance policy is effective.		
6. My parents/guardians know when I have skipped school.		
7. I think my school administration cares when I miss school.		
8. I think my teacher(s) care when I miss school.		
9. I have skipped class or missed a day of school because I was not prepared for class.		
10. I have skipped class or missed a day of school because I thought the class was boring.		
11. I have skipped class or missed a day of school because of a conflict with a teacher.		
12. I have engaged in sexual activity while skipping school.		
13. I have skipped school because of alcohol and/or drug use.		
14. I have missed school because I was being bullied.		
15. I feel safe at school.		
16. My school has consequences for being truant.		
17. My school rewards students for good attendance.		
18. I am worried that my absences will affect my chance to graduate.		

19. Have you ever skipped school?   Yes   No

20. If yes, what did you do?

_____

_____

21. What is the main reason you would skip school?

_____

_____

22. Have you ever been sent to Truancy Board?   Yes   No

23. Did the Truancy Board change the way you think about being truant from school?

    Yes   No   If yes, explain: _____

24. Have you ever had a petition filed on you or your parent/guardian because of truancy

    issues?   Yes   No

25. If yes, what was the outcome?

_____

_____

26. Is there anything you think schools can do to keep students from skipping school?

_____

_____

_____

27. Is there anything you would like to add?

_____

_____

_____

VITA

SELINA MICHELLE RECTOR BLEVINS

Personal Data: Place of Birth; Johnson City, Tennessee
               Marital Status; Married
               Children; Two

Education: Public Schools, Washington County, Tennessee
               East Tennessee State University, Johnson
                   City, Tennessee, B.S., 2003
               Milligan College, Milligan, Tennessee, M.A.,
                   2004
               East Tennessee State University, Johnson
                   City, Tennessee Ed. D., 2009

Professional
Experience: Teacher, Sulphur Springs School,
                   Jonesborough, Tennessee, 2003-2007
               Attendance Official, Washington County
                   Schools, Jonesborough, Tennessee 2007-
                   2008
               Assistant Principal, Lamar Elementary
                   School, Jonesborough, Tennessee 2008-
                   Present

Professional
Memberships: Washington County Education Association
               Tennessee Education Association
               National Education Association
               Kappa Delta Pi